



## Research article

### Insights into Breastfeeding: A Survey of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Among Mothers in Hilla Governorate, Iraq

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#### ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Breastfeeding is a critical public health action that significantly impacts maternal and infant health. Despite recommendations from WHO and UNICEF for early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding for six months, many countries struggle to meet these goals. This study aimed to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to breastfeeding among mothers in Hilla Governorate, Iraq. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted at the pediatric department of Imam Sadiq Hospital in Babylon City from November 2024 to March 2025. 100 postpartum mothers with infants under one year were randomly selected. Data was collected using a questionnaire based on WHO KAP surveys and previous studies. The survey assessed demographics and breastfeeding knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed. **Results:** Most mothers were urban (53%), unemployed (95%), and aged 20-25 years (35%). All mothers engaged in breastfeeding, with 60% initiating within one hour of birth. Knowledge levels were high, with nearly all mothers recognizing the importance of colostrum and breastfeeding. However, only 65% agreed to continue exclusive breastfeeding for six months, and 50% for two years. Attitudes were generally positive, with all mothers recommending breastfeeding. Practices varied, with all mothers acknowledging the importance of proper nutrition and bonding during breastfeeding. **Conclusions:** While overall knowledge and attitudes towards breastfeeding were positive among mothers in Hilla Governorate, gaps in specific practices and duration of exclusive breastfeeding were identified. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address misconceptions, improve support systems, and enhance breastfeeding practices to align with WHO recommendations and improve maternal and infant health outcomes in the region.

#### Keywords:

Knowledge,  
Attitudes,  
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## INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding (BF) is a critical and cost-effective public health intervention that significantly affects maternal and infant health. A Lancet meta-analysis demonstrated that breastfeeding protects against respiratory, diarrheal, and other severe infections [1].

Children who are exclusively breastfed demonstrate superior performance on intelligence tests, exhibit lower risks of obesity, and are less prone to asthma

and diabetes later in life. Furthermore, women who engage in breastfeeding experience a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Consequently, the promotion of breastfeeding contributes to improved national health, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries. The WHO and UNICEF recommend BF initiation within one hour of birth, exclusive BF for the first six months, followed by the introduction of safe and nutritionally adequate

complementary foods at six months, along with continued BF until two years or beyond [2].

The WHO aims to increase the rate of exclusive BF for the first six months to at least 50% by 2025 [3]. The World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi), which assesses policy and program gaps, reported in 2015 that India scored 0/10 on the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative [4]. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare implemented the "Mother's Absolute Affection" (MAA) program in 2016 to enhance early and exclusive breastfeeding in healthcare facilities [5].

Despite an 80% institutional delivery rate in Himachal Pradesh, only 84% of hospital-born infants are breastfed on their first day, 45% initiate BF within the first hour, and 70% of infants under six months are exclusively breastfed [6]. While this indicates an improvement from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) [7], a significant number of infants still do not receive highly nutritious colostrum or its associated antibodies. According to NFHS-5, Himachal Pradesh's infant mortality rate (IMR) is estimated at 26 per thousand live births, a decrease from 34 in NFHS-4, with an under-five mortality rate of 29 deaths per thousand live births [6]. To achieve Himachal Pradesh's sustainable development goals for infant and neonatal mortality rates, the promotion of BF is essential to promote BF.

This study aimed to evaluate the knowledge and breastfeeding practices of mothers who gave birth in hospitals.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS:

A cross-sectional study involving mothers in the postpartum phase brought their infants to vaccination clinics. The research was performed at the Community of Alsadiq Hospital in Babylon City from 1/11/2024 to 1/3/2025. This study randomly selected mothers of infants under one year of age. Exclusion criteria included those who refused to provide informed consent, mothers unavailable during the study period, and any breastfeeding mothers with children over one year of age. A total of 100 postpartum mothers were included in this study. Ethical approval was

obtained prior to commencing the study.

The study instrument comprised of many questions that focused on mothers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to breastfeeding. Most of these questions were based on a survey conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) KAP [8,9], in conjunction with the survey conducted by Thomas *et al.* [10]. The initial questions addressed the respondents' demographics, including age, employment status, educational level, and type and number of childbirths, followed by questions regarding their knowledge, attitude, and practices concerning breastfeeding. Each mother included in the sample received some form of health education regarding the benefits of breastfeeding.

Statistical Analysis: Data was entered into Excel and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS:

This study shows that most mothers are urban (53%) and rural (47 %), according to their employment status; the results indicate that the majority were unemployed (95). With respect to age, the majority (35%) of postnatal mothers were within the 20–25 years age group, as shown in [Table 1]. A significant proportion (42%) were primary schools, and the majority (76%) were delivered via cesarean section.

The data in [Table 2] represent the knowledge of postnatal mothers regarding breastfeeding. Approximately all postnatal mothers reported that pre-lacteal feed was very important for their infants, and that it is very important for Colostrum to maintain immunity and it can prevent disease affecting breast, which should be done after each feed. About 60% thought that formula-fed babies were more likely to be overfed than breastfed babies. Nearly all mothers agreed with our questions related to the importance of breast feeding.

[Table 3] presents the mothers' attitudes towards breastfeeding. All mothers 100% recommended breastfeeding, while only 70% of mothers under estimation were breastfed, while the study showed that only 65% agreed to continue breastfeeding for

six months after birth, which was equal to 50% in the answer for the mother to continue breastfeeding for two years.

[Table 4] represents or indicates the Practice score of mothers' knowledge about the importance of breastfeeding. The survey showed that all breastfeeding mothers agreed that healthy nutrition,

sitting properly, gazing at the baby's eyes, and petting him are very important for the baby's health and normal development. Table also show Only 70% of mothers know the importance of Wash each breast with warm water before breastfeeding, while about 53 % agree with the importance of Awakening the baby while breastfeeding.

**Table 1: Demographics details**

Demographic	Group	Frequency	Percentage %
Age in years	<19	9	9%
	20_ - 25	35	35%
	26 - 30	32	32%
	>31	24	24%
Residence	Urban	53	53%
	rural	47	47%
Employment	Unemployed	95	95%
	Government employed	5	5%
	Private sector employed	0	0%
Education	Illiterate	20	20%
	Primary school	42	42%
	Secondary school	18	18%
	College -higher education	20	20%
Type of delivery	Caesarian section	76	76%
	Normal vagina delivery	24	24%
Type feeding in the first hour	Breastfeeding	40	40%
	Bottle feeding	60	60%
Source information	Tv media	40	40%
	Education at health institute	5	5%
	Family - friend	55	55%

**Table 2: Knowledge score for mother Breast feeding**

	Knowledge score	Yes	No
1.	Colostrum is the first breast milk	100	0
2.	Colostrum is important for the baby to maintain immunity Burping should be done after each feed	100	0
3.	Breast feeding should be continued Up to 2 years Exclusive breast milk can be given during first 6 months	100	0
4.	Breast feeding helps in mother and child bonding	100	0
5.	Breast feeding can prevent diseases affecting breast	100	0
6.	Breastfeed affects the beauty of feeding mothers	100	0
7.	The benefits of breast milk last only as long as the baby is breast fed*	100	0
8.	Formula feeding is more convenient than breastfeeding	5	95
9.	Breastfeeding increases mother infant bonding	100	0
10.	Breast milk is lacking in iron*	50	50
11.	Formula fed babies are more likely to be overfed than breastfed babies	60	40
12.	Formula feeding is the better choice if the mother plans to go back to work*	100	0

13.	Mothers who formula feed miss one of the great joys of motherhood	95	5
14.	Women should not breastfeed in public places such as restaurants	100	0
15.	Breastfed babies are healthier than formula fed babies	100	0
16.	Breastfed babies are more likely to be overfed than formula fed babies	100	0
17.	Breast milk is the ideal food for babies	100	0
18.	Breast milk is more easily digested than formula	100	0
19.	Formula is as healthy for an infant as breast milk*	40	60
20.	Breastfeeding is more convenient than formula	100	0
21.	Breast milk is cheaper than formula	100	0
22.	A mother who occasionally drinks alcohol should not breastfeed her baby*	100	0
* Reverse-scored items			

**Table 3: Mothers' attitudes towards breastfeeding**

	Attitude score	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1.	Do you will breastfeed your baby	70	25	5
2.	Do you recommend breast feeding to other women	100	0	0
3.	Do you will continue breast feeding for 6 months	65	25	10
4.	Do you will continue breast feeding for 2 years	50	30	20

**Table 4: Practice score for mother breastfeeding**

	Practice score	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1.	A lactating mother should take healthy food to improve the secretion of milk	100	0
2.	During breastfeeding, the mother should sit comfortably	100	0
3.	During breastfeeding, the mother should maintain eye-to-eye contact and talk with the baby	100	0
4.	Wash each breast with warm water before breastfeeding	70	30
5.	Awakening the baby while breastfeeding	53	47

## DISCUSSIONS:

The first class of expertise is the primary examination to examine knowledge and attitudes in the direction of breastfeeding among postnatal mothers within the Hilla Governate through the use of an internationally standardized tool (IIFAS). The gift examination verified excellent expertise amongst those mothers, who held impartial attitudes closer to breastfeeding, indicating room for improvement.

In the existing examination, the majority (100%) of the mothers breastfed their infants. These findings are supported by the aid of using preceding research carried out in one-of-a-kind elements of the world [11,12]. However, the low occurrence of EBF at six months of age in our examination turned into a

significant decrease from that pronounced in previous research [13] but was better than that pronounced in current research from India (7.8% and 16.5%) [14], New Guinea (17%) [15], and Nigeria [16]. Further, research implies that the superiority of extraordinary breastfeeding at six months is normally low in low-income nations and varies from 9% [17] to 40% [18]. The majority of moms began supplementary feed at 4-6 months of age. The motives given with the aid of using them were inadequate milk to chill out the baby, and they believed that breast milk by themselves was inadequate for a developing baby.

Published reviews imply that inadequate milk delivery is the most common cause stated with the aid of using ladies for weaning. This location was similar to that in another study. <sup>[19]</sup> In a current



assessment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), extraordinary breastfeeding (EBF) for six months was considered one of the most important interventions to acquire the Millennium Development Goals (MDG-4) [20]. However, breastfeeding advertising interventions in growing nations have been proven to bring about a six-fold boom in extraordinary breastfeeding costs at six months [21]. According to the Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF, 2006) guidelines, the Government of India recommends that initiation of breastfeeding start immediately after birth, ideally within one hour [22]. Though the majority of moms typically and in the hospital, 60% of the mothers reported that they had initiated breastfeeding within an hour. The maximum not unusual motives for postponing the initiation of breastfeeding, as stated with the aid of using the mothers, were delayed behind schedule moving of the mothers from the labor room, infants inside the neonatal ICU, Caesarean section, and own circle of relatives' restriction.

This is not the same as that pronounced in research carried out on one-of-a-kind elements of the world, which ranged from 36% to 31% [23]. In contrast, little research has verified a better fee of breastfeeding initiation (38 % [24], 53 % [25], and 72.2 %) [26]. However, statistics from numerous research studies in India show that initiation charges range from 16% to 54.5% [27]. These findings imply that fitness specialists must be aware that the significance of early breastfeeding is a pressing concern.

In the existing examination, 100 % of the mothers were privy to the EBF. This location is regular with preceding consequences, indicating that lactating mothers from growing nations have terrific expertise in EBF [28]. Similarly, 20% of moms in the present-day examined felt that they must preserve breastfeeding until the age of two years. This finding is consistent with a current examination that observed that 100 % of mothers were conscious that they had to breastfeed until the age of two years [29]. Mothers who were breastfed at 6 months had a higher score (30 %) at the IIFAS than their non-breastfeeding counterparts (10 %),

and a significant distinction was found.

Previous research has also shown that mothers who no longer breastfeed have poor attitudes toward breastfeeding [30]. Most moms had low mindset rankings in the direction of "Breast milk is missing in iron, and formula-fed infants are much more likely to be overfed than breastfed infants. However, consistent with preceding reviews on breastfeeding, most mothers agreed that breastfeeding promotes mom-little bonding [31].

Several studies have additionally highlighted mental blessings for each mother and infant, because the act of breastfeeding is a time of bodily touch and closeness that nurtures the bond among them [32]. In line with preceding research, mothers from city backgrounds had better IIFAS rankings and indicated greater advantageous attitudes closer to breastfeeding [33]. Maternal training has been defined as one of the strongest determinants of EBF practices [34].

Although no distinction was observed among training and mindset rankings, surprisingly, in our examination, illiterate moms (20 %) held more advantageous attitudes closer to breastfeeding than literate mothers (80 %) held better positive attitudes toward breastfeeding. This location is like Jordan, wherein less-knowledgeable women were much more likely to breastfeed than women with better instructional levels [35]. Studies imply that mothers with a better circle of relative earnings have higher attitudes in the direction of breastfeeding, and comparable findings have been determined inside the examined sample [36].

However, a statistically significant distinction was not observed among mindset rankings, age, and employment. Mothers older than 25 years and homemakers had more advantageous attitudes toward breastfeeding. This location is consistent with preceding reviews displaying excessive charges of EBF attention among older groups [37] and homemakers [38]. These findings may be attributed to homemakers who can recognize motherhood more than working ladies.

Studies have observed an immediate correlation

between advantageous attitudes toward breastfeeding and superior EBF practices [39]. The moms inside the gift examination had ok expertise and impartial attitudes closer to breastfeeding. These findings are supported by a recent examination that observed that most mothers had impartial expertise and attitudes closer to breastfeeding.

## CONCLUSION

The survey on "Insights into Breastfeeding: A Survey of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Among Mothers" reveals that while most mothers possess a positive attitude towards breastfeeding and understand its health benefits, there are notable gaps in knowledge and challenges in practice. Factors such as cultural beliefs, support systems, and access to information significantly influence breastfeeding duration and exclusivity. To improve breastfeeding rates, targeted educational interventions, enhanced support from healthcare providers, and community awareness programs are essential. Overall, fostering a supportive environment and addressing misconceptions can promote optimal breastfeeding practices and improve maternal and child health outcomes.

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